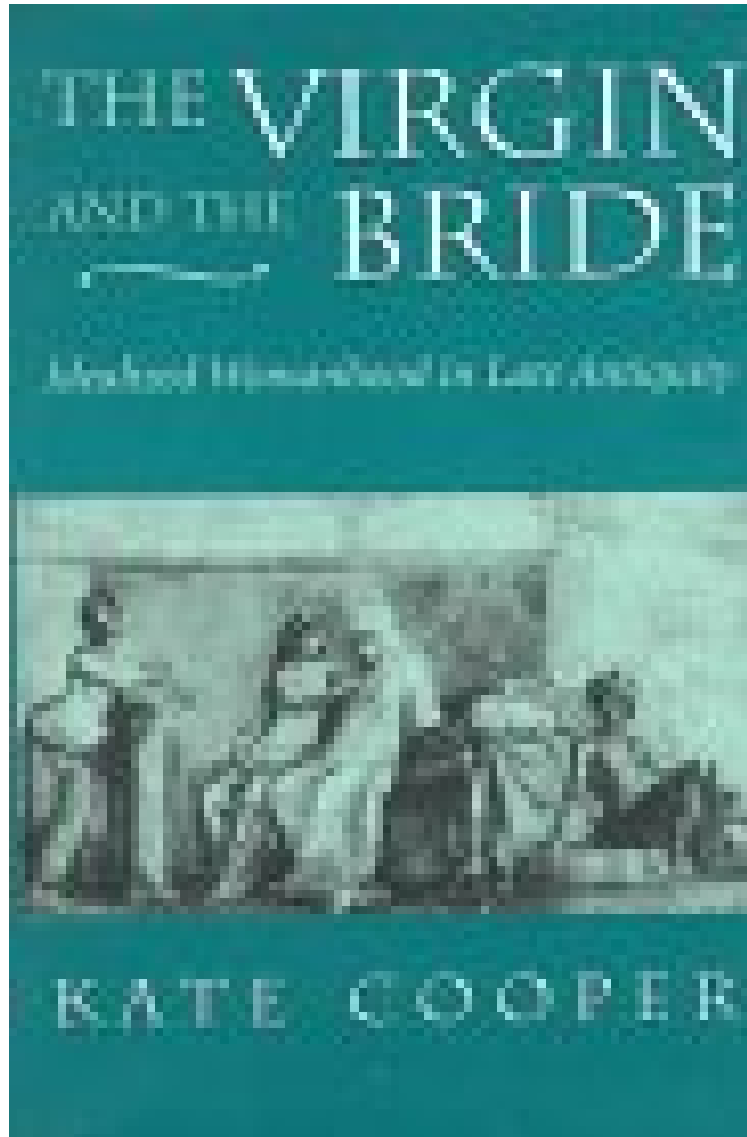


[Library ebook] The Virgin and the Bride: Idealized Womanhood in Late Antiquity

The Virgin and the Bride: Idealized Womanhood in Late Antiquity

Kate Cooper

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Kate Cooper : The Virgin and the Bride: Idealized Womanhood in Late Antiquity before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Virgin and the Bride: Idealized Womanhood in Late Antiquity:

During the last centuries of the Roman Empire, the prevailing ideal of feminine virtue was radically transformed: the

pure but fertile heroines of Greek and Roman romance were replaced by a Christian heroine who ardently refused the marriage bed. How this new concept and figure of purity is connected with--indeed, how it abetted--social and religious change is the subject of Kate Cooper's lively book. The Romans saw marital concord as a symbol of social unity--one that was important to maintaining the vigor and political harmony of the empire itself. This is nowhere more clear than in the ancient novel, where the mutual desire of hero and heroine is directed toward marriage and social renewal. But early Christian romance subverted the main outline of the story: now the heroine abandons her marriage partner for an otherworldly union with a Christian holy man. Cooper traces the reception of this new ascetic literature across the Roman world. How did the ruling classes respond to the Christian claim to moral superiority, represented by the new ideal of sexual purity? How did women themselves react to the challenge to their traditional role as matrons and matriarchs? In addressing these questions, Cooper gives us a vivid picture of dramatically changing ideas about sexuality, family, and morality--a cultural revolution with far-reaching implications for religion and politics, women and men. *The Virgin and the Bride* offers a new look at central aspects of the Christianization of the Roman world, and an engaging discussion of the rhetoric of gender and the social meaning of idealized womanhood.

Cooper's focus...is the tension between virginity and marriage as Christian ideals during the rise of the ascetic movement, and her main strength is her insistence that theological debates did not take place in a cultural vacuum but within the parameters set by traditional Graeco-Roman views of sexuality. She goes further than many previous writers on this period in her confident integration of the 'classical' and 'theological' sources; and she is surely right to identify the reluctance of classicists to get mixed up with theologians, the 'anti-intellectual population of religious fanatics', as one of the reasons why interdisciplinary work on church history is still relatively rare...[An] excellent study. (Helen King *Times Literary Supplement*) Kate Cooper proposes persuasive ways of looking at virginity and the married state for women from the second century to the sixth. She is good on the novelistic genres, insisting on understanding them. (Paul McKechnie *Ecclesiastical Journal*) This elegant and lucid study seeks to alter the belief among many historians that asceticism played a central role in ancient Christian women's lifestyles and sense of identity. Cooper's narrative takes refreshingly unexpected turns as she leads the reader through Apocryphal Acts and fourth-century Roman's ascetic and anti-ascetic literature to Gregory the Great, fictionalized martyrs' tales and a spiritual manual for married women dating from the fifth or sixth century. She also makes astute use of archaeological evidence. Through these fragmentary sources she discerns the honourable figure of the chaste and fruitful Christian wife, whom she seeks to restore as the leading representation of idealized womanhood in Late Antiquity. (Verna Harrison *Journal of Theological Studies [UK]*) This book explores the values of marriage and virginity during the centuries in which Rome was changed from a pagan to a Christian empire. Unlike most of the books on this period, this one places literate Romans, instead of Christian polemicists, at the center of the narrative...Cooper makes an unusual and convincing case that [Hellenistic romantic tales] in fact articulate a highly conservative position that placed marriage at the center of civic responsibility...In addition to offering a fresh look at familiar sources (like Plutarch and the Apocryphal Acts), this book shows the historical value of largely ignored sources (such as romantic novels)...A pleasure to read, and full of unusual insights about Rome, literature, power, and gender. (Joyce E. Salisbury *The Historian*) A study of one of the phenomena of late antiquity, the cult of virginity...[It is] full of flashes of insight. (Virginia Quarterly) Informed by socio-linguistic theory and well-grounded in social history, Cooper's study sheds considerable new light on the rhetorical processes by which Christianity contributed to the transformation of late ancient society, especially in matters of gender and sexuality...Cooper has established herself as an important voice in the ongoing discussion of asceticism and gender in early Christianity. (David G. Hunter *Catholic Historical*) Boy meets girl, boy converts girl, soldiers torture and kill girl--texts about women from late antiquity tell us less about the women who populate them than about the men who wrote them. Cooper argues that the Christian claim to moral superiority via the rejection of marriage--and the replacement of the stock plots of ancient romance novels with Christian plots--were rhetorical rather than descriptive or prescriptive in nature. Yet rhetoric can shape experience. Cooper recognizes that by the fifth and sixth centuries 'the widespread adaptation of Christian literary forms to the uses of the leisured and literate classes resulted in a new, perhaps unprecedented, attention to the problem of how female readers might apprehend the Christian heroines,' but earlier writings too, whether or not intended for that purpose, did have an impact on 'the self-understanding and behavior of actual women.' (Ruth Mazo Karras *Common Knowledge*) This book is an intelligent addition to a growing field of scholarly work which seeks to understand the role(s) and position(s) of women in late antiquity (and the early Christian period) by analyzing the sources using modern techniques, rather than by projecting modern sensibilities into the past. It is possible that some readers outside the English-speaking world will not fully understand what that means, and might be tempted to dismiss the book as 'women's studies'. That would be unfortunate...One can hope that the book's suggestions will be followed up in detail. (Edward J. Mroz *Analecta Bollandiana*) This elegant and lucid study seeks to alter the belief among many historians that asceticism played a central role in ancient Christian women's lifestyles and sense of identity. Cooper's narrative takes refreshingly unexpected turns as she leads the reader through diverse texts ranging from Plutarch and hellenistic

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From the Back Cover During the last centuries of the Roman Empire, the prevailing ideal of feminine virtue was radically transformed: the pure but fertile heroines of Greek and Roman romance were replaced by a Christian heroine who ardently refused the marriage bed. How this new concept and figure of purity is connected with - indeed, how it abetted - social and religious change is the subject of Kate Cooper's lively book. The Romans saw marital concord as a symbol of social unity - one that was important to maintaining the vigor and political harmony of the empire itself. This is nowhere more clear than in the ancient novel, where the mutual desire of hero and heroine is directed toward marriage and social renewal. But early Christian romance subverted the main outline of the story: now the heroine abandons her marriage partner for an otherworldly union with a Christian holy man. Cooper traces the reception of this new ascetic literature across the Roman world. How did the ruling classes respond to the Christian claim to moral superiority, represented by the new ideal of sexual purity? How did women themselves react to the challenge to their traditional role as matrons and matriarchs? In addressing their questions, Cooper gives us a vivid picture of dramatically changing ideas about sexuality, family, morality - a cultural revolution with far-reaching implications for religion and politics, women and men. *The Virgin and the Bride* offers a new look at central aspects of the Christianization of the Roman world, and an engaging discussion of the rhetoric of gender and the social meaning of idealized womanhood.

About the Author Kate Cooper is Senior Lecturer in Early Christianity, University of Manchester.